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University for Peace

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-second session, in resolution 52/9, of 4 November 1997, the General Assembly recognized the varied activities carried out by the University for Peace despite the limitations that impeded the full development of its activities and programmes for carrying out its important mandate. The Assembly invited financial contributions to the University, invited Member States to accede to the International Agreement for the Establishment of the University for Peace, and requested the Secretary-General to consider ways of strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the University for Peace. The three closely interlinked issues of financial support, political support, and the revitalization of the University, through effective governance and management structures, have been of primary concern in the steps that have been taken by the Secretary-General, the Director-General of UNESCO and the Council of the University. The present report draws extensively on information provided by the Council in accordance with decisions taken at its tenth session (Paris, 29-30 March 1999).

2. Since 1997, and especially in 1999, vigorous actions to revitalize the University involving the Secretary-General, UNESCO and the host Government, Costa Rica, have been the main focus of the United Nations involvement. The present report focuses on the steps that have been taken and the prospects for the future.

3. In the process of reform, proposals were guided by the conviction that the role of the University for Peace and the need to implement its mandate are stronger than ever before. In a world riven by conflicts, the peace and security role of the United Nations has become more important and complex. Recent upheavals have demonstrated the importance of preventing and resolving conflicts. The main victims of many of these conflicts are largely civilian non-combatants — particularly women, children and the elderly. The human costs of conflicts are immense, and the wounds they inflict on the attitudes of people and their relationships with one another heal much more slowly than their physical wounds. This reinforces the necessity of developing a "culture of peace" which will entrench within societies the values, the attitudes and the bonds of common interests, which transcend the differences from which conflicts arise.

4. Peace is not a static concept particularly, when the status quo reinforces continuing inequities, injustices and tyranny. We live in a world of unprecedented wealth — and opportunity — but one in which gross inequities and imbalances continue to deprive major portions of the world's population of the benefits which our technological civilization now makes possible. The fact that we have greater concentrations of wealth than ever and more poor and

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deprived challenges the moral basis of our civilization. The gulf between the beneficiaries and those left out in the process of globalization is growing. Redressing the gross imbalances and inequities to which this gives rise is a prerequisite to sustained and sustainable peace. It is the primary challenge for the twenty-first century.

5. The process of change is itself a source of tension and potential conflict which must be addressed realistically. The prevention of conflicts and maintenance of peace is therefore, largely a matter of learning to manage the processes of dynamic change required to enable all to have access to the benefits that the globalization has made possible. This is why the goal of achieving and maintaining peace and security must be pursued with development that is sustainable in economic, environmental, social and human terms and that redresses the imbalances and inequities from which conflicts arise.

6. Many lessons are to be learned from the past experiences of the United Nations in its peacemaking and peacekeeping operations which can help produce better and more effective means of preventing and resolving future conflicts.

7. It is in this context that the mission of the University for Peace is to be pursued, in order to strengthen it and extend its programmes and capacities so as to enable it to fulfil the purpose for which it was established by the General Assembly.

II. Background

8. The University for Peace was established in December 1980 pursuant to resolution 35/55 of the General Assembly, to "provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace and with the aim of promoting among all human beings the spirit of understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among people and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress, in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations". It is headquartered in the outskirts of San José, Costa Rica.

9. The University has a unique constitutional status within the United Nations family, having been established by an international agreement approved by the General Assembly. It exists outside the normal framework of reporting and accountability requirements that apply to most United Nations organizations and agencies. This gives it an unusual degree of operating autonomy and flexibility and enables it to serve as a link between the governmental and non-governmental constituencies in addressing peace and security issues. Although this feature has been utilized thus far to only a limited extent, it will have much greater relevance and value in the period ahead, in which new public/private partnerships and alliances will provide the most effective means of dealing with the complex issues that bear on peace and security. The University for Peace is also the only truly international university that has the authority to grant degrees, which it does at the Master's and Doctor's level.

10. The University for Peace receives no financing from the United Nations budget, and it must seek its financing entirely from voluntary contributions. Since its inception, the University for Peace has received only limited funding from a relatively few sources, and its programmes have necessarily been modest in scale and largely confined to Central and South America. In 1991, the Secretary-General, with the cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme, created a special trust fund to help the University cover operating costs, but funds remain low.

11. The governing body of the University for Peace consists of a Council composed of 15 members appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in consultation with the Director-General of UNESCO. They include two nominees of the host country, Costa Rica, and, as ex-officio members, representatives of the United Nations, UNESCO and the United Nations University. The Executive Head of the University is the Rector, appointed by the Council. Most of the programmes and activities of the University have been carried out at its campus. In addition, there is the World Centre for Research and Information on Peace, in Montevideo, Uruguay, and, there are programme representatives in six other Central American countries, as well as in Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Italy, and Peru.

III. Steps for revitalization

Appointment of new members to the Council

12. Recently, as part of the continuing programme of United Nations reform, the Secretary-General, with the support and advise of the UNESCO Director-General and the encouragement and support of the Government of Costa Rica, has taken steps to reorganize, strengthen and more fully internationalize the University for Peace, so as to enable it to contribute more effectively to the peace and security programmes of the United Nations and the goals of

its Charter. The Council was reconstituted with entirely new members, who met at UNESCO headquarters on 29 and 30 March 1999. At that meeting Maurice Strong of Canada was elected President of the Council and assumed the additional responsibilities of Rector until such time a new Rector is appointed. The Council also elected Elizabeth Odio, Vice-President of Costa Rica, as Vice-President of the Council. The second Costa Rican nominee, Ambassador Sonia Picado, was also appointed to the Council. An Executive Committee has been established by the Council to exercise its functions until its next session.

13. The new administration has initiated a process of thorough review of all the University's existing programmes, capacities and facilities, to develop a new long-term strategy with accompanying programme proposals, budget, work and management plans to be presented to the Council at its November meeting. At that meeting the Council will also consider a strategic partnership with the Earth Council, a global non-governmental organization founded as a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992) and also situated in San José. The Earth Council's goals and programmes have a significant degree of common interest and complementarity with the goals and programmes of the University for Peace, and such an alliance would produce, in turn, significant benefits in terms of programming and of cost-effectiveness for each organization.

Administration and finance

14. One of the most serious impediments to the ability of the University for Peace in recent years to fulfil its mission and meet the expectations for which it was established has been the disorderly state of its administrative, personnel and accounting practices and the lack of oversight and accountability. Until the meeting of the newly constituted Council in March 1999, there had been no meeting of the Council since 1994, largely because of financial constraints. No audited financial statements have been prepared since 1993. The action taken by the Secretary-General was designed to rectify this situation and to prepare the University for Peace for a new era of service to and in support of the peace and security goals of the United Nations.

15. The new administration has concentrated initially on refurbishing the administrative personnel and accounting procedures and practices with the object of bringing them to the highest international professional standards. An independent audit has been commissioned to bring the financial statements of the University up to date, and an extensive review is being carried out of all current programmes, relationships and practices. While most of the principal deficiencies are in the process of being rectified, it will take some time to implement fully the changes required to meet the standards now being set for the University.

Current programmes

16. The following programmes are currently in operation:

(a) Culture for peace and democracy in Central America. This programme, promoted by the Central American Governments and covering their respective countries, has been operating since 1994. Emphasis is on education for peace to different sectors, in cooperation with local organizations;

(b) Consensus-building and conflict resolution in Central America. This programme, initiated in 1996, in cooperation with local universities, is directed towards leaders of civil society. Training modules have been prepared;

(c) Natural resources and peace. At present efforts are limited to offering six short international courses, of from two to three weeks' duration, in continuation of efforts initiated in 1987;

(d) Doctorate in communications for peace. This programme is offered jointly with the University of La Laguna in Tenerife, Canary Islands, but all courses are given at the University for Peace. A high quality thesis is an essential requisite. Twenty-five students are working towards the degree;

(e) Master's degree in human rights and education for peace. Twenty-six students are following the five-trimester course schedule, with emphasis on perception of human rights, legal status, mediation and consensus. The degree is given jointly with the Costa Rican National University;

(f) World Centre for Research and Information on Peace. Located in Montevideo, Uruguay, the Centre aims to support communication with data banks related to conflict and peace;

(g) Gandhi Television Centre for Communication and Peace. This programme produces videos related to conflict and peace, and is self-supporting;

(h) Radio for Peace International. The station broadcasts short wave peace-related programmes as well as

lecture materials ("University of the Air") which are heard throughout much of the world. It is estimated that around 100,000 people listen to the emissions in five languages. Although situated on the campus of the University for Peace and cooperating closely with it, Radio for Peace International raises its own funds and accounts to its own board of trustees;

(i) CEDIPAZ. This programme operates as a centre for documentation and information for peace as well as the University library.

17. Although these programmes have provided the University with some valuable experience, they have not been on a scale or had the scope necessary to enable the University to fulfil its global mission.

Prospective programmes

18. Initial programme priorities will concentrate on those areas in which past experience and some of the promising new opportunities now being developed provide the University with a significant comparative advantage. Some of the programmes now being considered are:

(a) Culture of peace. This will consist of programmes contributing to the development of a "culture of peace", based on the experience gained by the University in its culture of peace programme in Central America and the leadership and cooperation of UNESCO, which has undertaken major responsibility for the guidance and development of the programme.

The year 2000, which was proclaimed by the General Assembly as International Year for the Culture of Peace,[1] provides a timely occasion for the process of revival of the University for Peace. In elaborating its future strategy and programme, the University will derive valuable guidance from the principles and modes of action included in the Declaration and the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace,[2] which includes a decision to expand initiatives promoting a culture of peace undertaken by institutions of higher education in various parts of the world, including the University for Peace;

(b) An "ombudsman". For the prevention and resolution of conflicts, particularly in respect of conflicts involving environment and natural resource issues of a trans-boundary nature, the ombudsman would draw upon the experience of the University for Peace in its conflict resolution programmes in Central America, the Earth Council in the extensive work it has done in designing an ombudsman programme, and on the World Conservation Union (IUCN), with its broad experience in the natural resources field and worldwide network of professional members;

(c) Environment, natural resources and peace. This programme consists of selective educational programmes building on existing ones of the University in this field, including programmes undertaken in cooperation with some of the leading universities in the field, leading to joint degrees at the Master's and Doctor's level;

(d) Peace parks. Although a number of peace parks have been established in various parts of the world and others are under development or consideration, there is no international focal point for the development of common standards and criteria and for the exchange of experience, nor is there a centre of knowledge and support for the development of new peace parks. Yet peace parks are being increasingly recognized both for creating zones of peace in sensitive boundary areas and for protecting important natural/biological resources. IUCN has joined with the University for Peace in exploring the prospects of joint development of a programme which would meet this need;

(e) The moral and spiritual foundations of peace (inner peace). The values, ethics and spiritual qualities that motivate people at the deepest level are the sources of the attitudes and behaviour which provide the foundations for peace. There are significant indications of interest in and support for a University for Peace programme in this area;

(f) The media and peace. Recent conflicts in the Balkans have demonstrated the pervasive influence of the media in shaping the attitudes that foster and sustain conflicts, on the one hand, and promote peace, on the other. Radio for Peace International, an affiliate of the University for Peace, has already demonstrated the value of the media in promoting peace;

(g) Economic development and peace. The linkages between economic development and the preservation of peace are clearly of fundamental importance. Economic failure, sustained unemployment, economic inequities and injustice create the conditions for violence and conflict at the local level, the national level and the international level. The preservation of peace in the next century will depend on achieving more equitable patterns of economic development which strengthen solidarity, reducing poverty, inequality, exclusion and the grounds for conflict;

(h) Democracy and peace. Recent events have underscored the relationship between democracy and peace. With the process of democratization, people looked eagerly towards new efforts to resolve conflicts. Important lessons

to be learned from the recent conflicts in Africa and Asia might be an appropriate field of research for the University for Peace. It is now in the process of exploring these prospects in cooperation with the Stockholm-based Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA);

(i) Fellows. A promising initiative is the University's plan to appoint people of exceptional experience and standing in the fields of peace negotiations, research and policy as Fellows of the University, to undertake research and carry out other assignments for the University on an "as available", part-time basis. The Fellows would also provide a roster of people with peace-related skills and experience who could be available to the United Nations for peace-related missions and assignments;

(j) In addition, plans call for special emphasis on the inclusion of promising and talented young people as internal support staff and teaching assistants in the University's programmes and activities.

19. Other programmes being examined include economics and peace, governance, the military and peace, migration, refugees and peace, human rights and peace, youth and peace, and "uncivil" threats to peace (e.g., organized crime).

20. While it would be unrealistic to expect the University for Peace to undertake programmes in all of these areas, it will be the task of the Council at its session on 22 and 23 November to determine priorities based on those areas in which the University can make the most distinctive and valuable contributions to the United Nations priorities, using its comparative advantage in adding value to the work done by others in these areas, and subject to the availability of financial resources and capacities required to carry out such activities in accordance with the highest standards of quality and professionalism.

21. A number of the key core programmes will be carried out at the San José campus of the University and characteristically be undertaken in cooperation with other United Nations organizations, universities and institutes which are among the best in their respective fields, through joint programmes and exchange of faculties, inter-active teleconferencing and Internet programming. For this purpose it is planned to establish the most up-to-date telecommunications and conferencing facilities. Most programmes, courses and research project centres will be carried out cooperatively with other existing organizations. In cases in which there is no focal point for a particular programme, the University for Peace, in cooperation with others, should be prepared to take a leadership position, as it is doing, for example, in the peace parks initiative, being undertaken cooperatively with IUCN.

22. There is encouraging evidence that the University will be able to attract some of the most able and respected people in the programme areas it is considering and to enter into cooperative arrangements and partnerships with some of the world's leading universities and institutes. Accordingly, the principal constraint on the pace and extent to which its programmes will develop and be carried out effectively will be the availability of finance. Already modest amounts of finance have been obtained to take the first steps in evaluating prospective programmes. However, the commitment to undertake any programme must be accompanied by assurances as to the availability of the funds required to carry it out and on a basis that will meet the highest quality standards.

IV. Future prospects

23. The University for Peace, within the framework of the United Nations, with its operational flexibility, is a useful vehicle for developing and demonstrating new modes of private/public partnership serving and supporting the peace and security mission of the United Nations. Although many other private and national institutes exist to undertake work of various kinds in the peace and security area, the University for Peace is the only one established by the United Nations especially for that purpose.

24. The future of the University is strongly tied to the political and financial support reflected not only in greater numbers of Governments acceding to the International Agreement for the Establishment of the University for Peace but also in increasing contributions of financial resources for the normal functioning of the University and the launching of new programmes. In light of the extensive measures that are under way in putting the University on a strong administrative and programmatic platform, commensurate political and financial support from member States would reinvigorate the long-term prospects for the University.

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution 53/243.

[2] General Assembly resolution 52/15.